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SUBJECT: DECLARATION OF DISASTER FOR FLOODING IN SAO NICOLAU, CAPE VERDE

11. This is an action request. Please see paragraph 9.

12. SUMMARY: Torrential rains have fallen on the island of Sao Nicolau, Cape Verde, during September and October 2009, causing flooding that has killed at least three people, displaced at least 41 families, and destroyed homes, personal property, and basic infrastructure. The Chief of Mission has determined that this disaster is beyond the capability of the host government to respond, that it is of sufficient magnitude to warrant US government assistance, and that it is in the best interest of the US government to provide assistance. The Chief of Mission is therefore exercising her disaster assistance authority to request USD 25,000. END SUMMARY.

13. Over the last two months, three waves of heavy rain fell on the mountainous and normally arid island of Sao Nicolau, one of nine inhabited islands comprising the Republic of Cape Verde. The rain was so intense at times that, according to an official source, more than 40 inches of precipitation fell in less than 36 hours in the island's capital city, Ribeira Brava. Moreover, the precipitation fell on steep, dry hillsides, causing flooding and landslides.

14. Until recently, the government and local Red Cross had been able to adequately respond by finding temporary housing and providing some basic needs for those affected. On October 20, however, another wave of rain arrived that crippled the host nation's capacity to address the disaster effectively, and prompted the state radio station to declare the situation "catastrophic." On October 27, even more rain fell, further aggravating relief efforts and damaging a main road that has already been repaired twice since the rains began.

15. The heavy rains and floods have caused extensive suffering, including loss of life. According to the Red Cross, at least three people were killed when a landslide buried them alive. The Red Cross also documented 41 families in the Ribeira Brava area alone, comprising 154 people, that lost property to the flooding, the large majority of which suffered serious damage to their homes. Some houses collapsed entirely or in part, others

were inundated with water or mud, and still more suffered enough structural damage to render them unfit to live in. Although many families are living with friends or relatives, these accommodations are just temporary solutions. Those unlucky enough to be without friends or family nearby have been forced either to stay in their homes despite the unsanitary and unsafe conditions, or in the case of one 77-year-old man, to sleep in the local jail. Moreover, many of those affected lack basic items such as blankets, mattresses, cleaning supplies, and cooking utensils, which were washed away or destroyed by the rains. Press reports calculate the total cost of the damage as exceeding USD 33 million.

¶16. The relatively poor economic situation of many affected residents has compounded their suffering. The two dominant industries in Sao Nicolau are farming and fishing, which are next to impossible to do in bad weather. The average Cape Verdean citizen is not wealthy-earning just \$3,200 per year according to the latest State Department Background Note-and most of the economic activity in the country is located on other islands. Further, at least 15 of the documented victims are over 60 years old, the oldest of which is an 85-year-old woman, and at least three have physical disabilities.

¶17. A Red Cross report also expresses concern over the medical situation on the island. The report cites a lack of medical supplies and personnel, and notes that additional cases of diarrhea have appeared due to unsanitary conditions. In

addition, the incidence of both malaria and dengue fever is increasing country-wide, including on Sao Nicolau, and the continued rains are creating breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

¶18. Both the local government and the Red Cross welcome US assistance. The Red Cross will use all US aid money to purchase basic goods for victims such as sleeping mats/mattresses, bedclothes, cooking pots, and cleaning supplies, the cost of which is estimated to be USD 25,000. This will immediately begin to alleviate the suffering of the residents of Sao Nicolau affected by the flooding, so that the local government - already overextended and in incapable of continuing to simultaneously provide basic relief, rebuild roads, and reconstruct homes - may focus on longer-term reconstruction.

¶19. ACTION REQUEST. The Ambassador believes that it is in the best interest of the USG to alleviate the human suffering caused by the disaster. Therefore, the Ambassador is exercising her disaster assistance authority to request that OFDA release USD 25,000 for immediate relief efforts. This money will be provided to the Red Cross for the purposes described in paragraph 8. END ACTION REQUEST.
MYLES